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20 June 1969

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Defense Department "White Paper" on the  
Safeguard ABM System

1. The White Paper is an unclassified version of Secretary Laird's testimony before two subcommittees of the House Committee on Appropriations on 22 May 1969. At the start of the briefing, Mr. Laird promised to go "as far as we possibly can within the limits of security" to make the briefing available to the public.

2. The Secretary first addresses the nature of the threat facing the United States over the next five to ten years. After prefacing his remarks with the observation that it takes only 18 to 24 months to build an ICBM silo, he inserts the appropriate reminder that intelligence projections beyond that point necessarily involve a large measure of judgment rather than hard evidence. The remainder of this section of his briefing consists of a mixture of information from relevant NIEs, data from other intelligence sources, and the Secretary's own observations. The distinctions between these three categories of information are not always made clear to the reader, however.

3. On page 9, for example, after reporting that the more than 230 SS-9s which are now operational or under construction could be fitted with three 5-megaton reentry vehicles each capable of attacking a different Minuteman silo (a possibility recognized in the Memorandum to Holders of 11-8-68), Laird inserts his own observation that a force of 420 such missiles (24 higher than the high side of the NIPP) probably could destroy 95 percent of the Minuteman force. Again, toward the bottom of page 9, after stating that the intelligence community estimates that the Soviets can produce eight Y-class submarines per year, Laird expresses his own belief that this production rate may increase significantly as the Soviets gain more production experience.

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4. Earlier in the paper (middle of page 8), after erroneously reporting that the intelligence estimates prepared last fall predicted that the buildup of Soviet ICBM forces would level off after reaching rough numerical parity with the US, Laird inserts the observation that the Soviets could have 2,500 ICBMs in service by the mid-1970s if they continue deploying them at 1967-68 rates.

5. On page eight, Mr. Laird selects the high side of the NIPP range in reporting that the Soviets probably will have about 400 large, SS-9 type missiles operational by the mid-1970s, and at the top a page 11, the Secretary attributes a more significant "loiter" capability to the ABMs being tested in the USSR than we are aware of.

6. The Secretary's reporting on the Chinese strategic threat sticks more closely to agreed national intelligence. The paragraph on page 13 which deals with the status of the Chinese ICBM program, for example, is a virtual quote of paragraphs 42, 43, and 45 of SNIE 13-8-69 dated 27 February 1969.

7. The remainder of the paper deals with the alternatives to Safeguard; the purposes, status, description, cost and effectiveness of the system; and the foreign policy considerations which affected the decision to deploy it. Aside from the points raised in paragraphs 4 and 5 above, the threat assessment portion of the paper contains a generally accurate but selective presentation of intelligence relating to the ABM problem.